



***Camille Melki – Heart for Lebanon
Relational Relief***

Dear friends, I bring you greetings from the country of Lebanon. My name is Camille Melki. I'm the Co-Founder and CEO of Heart for Lebanon and I'm very grateful and honored to join you at your conference On Mission 2021. And shouldn't we all be on mission on a specific and very important mission? And that is to share the Gospel with the entire world. Friends, I live in Lebanon. I was born and raised in Beirut. I have experienced so much hardships but nothing like the year 2020. The whole world suffered tremendously when we were caught off guard by this COVID-19 pandemic. The whole world has suffered economically, and the health care of many countries have been extremely devastated. Lebanon is no different. In fact, we are starting a new lock down because the COVID-19 cases continue to increase in our country. But COVID-19 is only one challenge our country has faced. In fact, today the economy of Lebanon has crippled so tremendously that our currency is 15% what it was worth a year ago.

Our government has failed us big time. We have had in fact four government resignations in the last 15 months and now we've been without the government for four consecutive months. All these come in addition to this horrific, devastating port of Beirut explosion on August 4th, 2020. This explosion was considered by the entire world as the worst non-nuclear explosion in history. It has caused \$12 billion of destruction. 330,000 homes were destroyed, and the families and inhabitants of those homes were made homeless in a flicker of a second. Tens of thousands of people were injured, many of whom will be permanently disabled. The country of Lebanon was devastated. The government of Lebanon has failed its people, but the body of Christ have not.

This is why I'm encouraged today, though I continue to say that over the country of Lebanon there is this dark cloud of despair, I'm also encouraged that together we are on a God-sized mission. To lead people out of despair to hope, hope in Christ and Christ alone. In the Middle East in general and in Lebanon in particular, this can only be done as we develop this trust-based relationship with those that God has called us to serve. You see, here at Heart for Lebanon, we say that we use access ministry in order to show the love of Jesus Christ in meaningful and tangible ways. Whether we bring food and basic hygiene supplies to the refugee population, and here, I must mention that Lebanon continues to host the largest refugee population per capita in the world. There is no country that has more refugees per capita in the world like the country of Lebanon.

So you can imagine the challenges the refugees have experienced. They come to Lebanon seeking refuge only to experience further hardship because of the economic, political, and social turmoil in our country. So both the refugees as well as the host communities are suffering so much. And what we do here at Heart for Lebanon is that we bring the love of Jesus Christ, as I said, in tangible and meaningful ways, food and basic hygiene supplies, shelter, sanitation, medical care, anything and everything that we

could offer to a needy family, so they would know that Jesus loves them. But also it's our opportunity to build this relationship of trust. We call that **Relational Engagement Ministry**.

At Heart for Lebanon, we spend long hours every day in the presence of a refugee family or a local Lebanese-marginalized community hearing and listening to their cries, hearing their broken stories, learning how the country and the government has failed them, how the society has failed them and looking for every opportunity to share a message of hope from Scripture. You see people who live in despair are asking those major questions. Does God exist? Does He care for our cries? Does He hear our cries? Does He care for our miseries? Does He see the hardship we are living in?

And they would only know the answer if we took the time. In a very honest moment, shed tears with them, be in their presence, heart breaking with them and look for the opportunity to share how we have experienced His love in the midst of despair. And when we win that trust, when they know that we come in the name of Jesus Christ, not in the name of any political party, not in the name of any paramilitary group, not in the name of any organization that is seeking financial profit over their miseries. When they know that we are real and the God we serve is real and cares for their need, then they are willing and ready to ask further beyond the questions, wanting to know who is the son of God? And who is this Jesus? And why does He really care? What does it mean that He has given His life on the cross?

Because of the Relational Engagement Ministry, we build this bridge from access ministries, from our tangible and meaningful ways of sharing the love of Jesus Christ into Bible Study Group, Seekers Group and worship gathering communities? I mentioned that Lebanon has the largest per capita refugee population in the world. I also mentioned that the country of Lebanon is so crippled in its economy and its people are living in such a dire mood of despair. This dark cloud is real over the country of Lebanon. But what is also real is that people are asking the right questions and they are seeking the truth and we are given this opportunity to lead them into a relationship with their Savior. Into a relationship with their Creator.

Today at our **Hope Ministry Center** whether in Southern Lebanon or in the Bekaa Valley, we have hundreds of Muslim converts, men and women who were born in the Muslim faith are today part of the Christian faith because they have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. By conviction and in a bold move on their part, they come and attend our Bible studies, participate in our worship gatherings. Whether it's a Kurdish-speaking congregation, or Arab-speaking congregation in both of our locations, we have hundreds of Lebanese, Syrians, Kurds and Arabs, Muslims, and nominal Christians together worshipping Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, declaring Him Lord and Savior over their life and the lives of their family.

You see, only if and when a person in need knows that you are real and I am real and only when we can build this relationship of trust, we will be given the invitation to share the Gospel boldly and clearly in their midst. Oh yes, in the Middle East and North Africa unfortunately, there's this vast wave of radicalism, but also there's this beautiful God-sized opportunity for us to be heralds of God's peace. And to be used as his conduit to reconcile the world with the Father. We have been given this beautiful gift to partner together hand in hand to be on mission, to reconcile the world with the Father. To partner with the Son Jesus Christ, on reconciling the world with the Father.

So, thank you for what you do in your own ministries. Thank you for what you do in your own communities and thank you for leading people out of despair into hope, hope in Christ. In Christ alone. Together, we are on a mission in 2021 to honor our Lord and Savior, to lead people out of despair, into hope in Jesus Christ. Thank you for what you do, and May God richly bless you. Stay safe.